

## YOUTHS KICK AIDS OUT OF BURKINA FASO

*Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007)* The crowd gathered as players were warming up for the most important game of their young lives. However, the pre-game preparation is absolutely atypical; besides stretches and ball passes, teams are reciting information about HIV/AIDS to make sure nothing is forgotten.

Africare, in conjunction with the North Region Department of Sports, held the regional Kick AIDS championship in Ouahigouya last March 30<sup>th</sup>. This highly anticipated event also served as the closing ceremony for the Kick AIDS pilot project, running from April 2005 to March 2006 with funding from USAID/West Africa Ambassadors' AIDS Fund (WAAF) through U.S. Embassy Ouagadougou. UNICEF and UNAIDS provided additional funding for project equipment as well as monitoring and evaluation of the project.



U.S. Ambassador, Jeanine Jackson, UNICEF Country Representative, Joan French, actively participated in the day's program by kicking off the girl's regional championship game. Also in attendance were the Governor of the North Region, National Assembly Deputy Ouseni Tamboura, World Concern's Sahel Region Representative, the Ministry of Sports' Sports for All Program Director, and the Director of the National Institute of Youth, Physical Education and Sports (INJEPS).

Two youth teams were crowned regional Kick AIDS champions: "FC Olympic", a boys' team from Gourcy, and "The Queens of Yatenga", a girls' team from Ouahigouya. These teams were awarded first-rate equipment (soccer uniforms, warm-up suits, and sports bags) donated by an American youth soccer team, "The Cavaliers" from McLean, Virginia. To qualify for this regional Championship game, these teams had to first triumph at the provincial level, not only by win soccer games, but also by accumulating points through team visits to their local HIV testing centers and team meetings with and donations to people living with HIV/AIDS. Teams also received points for with signing individual Game Plans for Life, in which players pledged to either Abstain, to Be faithful, or to use Condoms. Furthermore, players had to answer questions about HIV/AIDS at the end of each match and points granted for correct answers were added to the total score of the game.

In all, over 800 youths, divided in 42 teams, participated in the Regional Kick AIDS Tournament. This event also marked the first time ever that a regional girls' soccer tournament took place in the North region.

The Kick AIDS tournament was the culminating stage for these youths, who had been learning vital HIV prevention and care information during prior months through the Sports For Life Coach's Guide. Developed by Johns Hopkins University's Health Communication Partnerships, the Sports For Life Coach's Guide is a participatory life skills curriculum, which enables youths to learn and practice healthy behaviors through sports drills, games and discussions.

In her speech before a crowd of over 1,000 spectators and participants, US Ambassador Jackson promoted the use of sports in projects targeting youths and announced that the US embassy, through its WAAF, will provide funding for a second year of Kick AIDS activities in Burkina Faso.

